

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 021540Z AUG 78
FM AMCONSUL PALERMO
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INFO AMEMBASSY ROME
USDAO ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USDOCOSOUTH NAPLES FOR INTAF
COMSIXTHFLT

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EFIT, IT, LY
SUBJECT: LIBYANS USE SUBMARINE ON FISHERIES PATROL

1. ACCORDING TO STATEMENT BY CAPTAIN OH MAZARA DEL VALLO-BASED FISHING TRAWLER "ESCHILO", WHICH RETURNED TO HOME PORT EARLY JULY 31, "ESCHILO" WAS STOPPED AT 6:30 P.M. JULY 28 BY LIBYAN SUBMARINE WHICH REMOVED TWO CREW-MEMBERS WHO NOW ARE IN DETENTION IN LIBYA; ESCHILO'S CAPTAIN CLAIMS INCIDENT TOOK PLACE IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS THIRTY MILES NORTHEAST OF LIBYAN PORT OF MISURATA. SUBMARINE REPORTEDLY SURFACED SOME DISTANCE FROM ESCHILO WHICH WAS THEN SUBJECTED TO SMALL ARMS FIRE, NONE OF WHICH HIT ITALIAN VESSEL. WHEN ORDERED TO BOARD SUBMARINE WITH VESSEL'S DOCUMENTS, ESCHILO CAPTAIN SENT FISHING-MASTER AND OTHER CREW MEMBER WITH REQUESTED PAPERS. ONCE TWO ITALIAN CREW MEMBERS WERE ABOARD, LIBYANS ORDERED ESCHILO TO FOLLOW SUBMARINE TO MISURATA. SINCE
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ESCHILO UNABLE TO KEEP UP WITH SUBMARINE'S 18-KNOT SPEED, IT RAPIDLY LOST SIGHT OF LIBYAN UNIT AND TOOK OPPORTUNITY TO ALTER COURSE FOR SICILY.

2. INTEREST IN ESCHILO EVENT HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ALSO ON LIBYA'S JULY 26 SEIZURE OF THE PALMA I, ANOTHER MAZARA-BASED FISHING VESSEL. IN TAKING PALMA I,

LIBYANS EVIDENTLY SHOT AND WOUNDED ITALIAN CREW MEMBER WHO, WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF PALMA'S CREW, ARE NOW REPORTEDLY BEING HELD IN TRIPOLI.

3. CASES OF BOTH ESCHILO AND PALMA I NOW SUBJECT OF DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSION TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER OR NOT LIBYAN TERRITORIAL WATERS AND/OR PROTECTED FISHING ZONES WERE VIOLATED BY ITALIAN VESSELS. IN THIS CONTEXT, GOI HAS CALLED MEETING OF INTERESTED GOVERNMENT AGENCIES (FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE, MERCHANT MARINE) TO MEET WITH MAZARA FISHING INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES AND SICILIAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN ROME ON AUGUST 4. IN MEANTIME, MAZARA FISHERMEN HAVE CALLED AGAIN FOR BEEFING-UP ITALIAN NAVAL PRESENCE IN CONTESTED AREA. NEED FOR FISHING AGREEMENT WITH LIBYA, SUCH AS ITALO-TUNISIAN AGREEMENT, HAS ALSO BEEN STRESSED.

4. WHILE FISHING BOAT SEIZURES IN STRAITS OF SICILY ARE HARDLY A NOVELTY, LIBYANS USE OF SUBMARINES IS DEFINITELY A FIRST IN SUCH MATTERS. INDEED, UNTIL RECENTLY LIBYANS REPORTEDLY DID NOT HAVE A SUBMARINE CAPABILITY. THIS SHORTCOMING HAS NOW BEEN CORRECTED BY SOVIET TRANSFER OF AT LEAST ONE FOXTROT-CLASS DIESEL SUBMARINE. ONE SUCH VESSEL MADE OFFICIAL PORT VISIT TO PALERMO JUNE 22 WITH THREE OTHER SOVIET-SUPPLIED LIBYAN NAVAL VESSELS.
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COLLINS

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